

The Discovery of King Richard III

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0.1 The Mystery of King Richard III's Burial Site

The burial site of King Richard III, who was thrown into his grave over 500 years ago, became a mystery shrouded in myths, rumors, and mistakes. This journey began after the Battle of Bosworth wherein Richard III was found dead, and his enemy, Henry Tudor, declared himself king, taking Richard's body to Leicester where it was displayed publicly. Records say Richard was buried unceremoniously beneath Greyfriars Church, and a monument was placed above his grave. However, when Henry VIII began dismantling the Catholic Church, Greyfriars was demolished, and the land was sold to the mayor of Leicester, who built a mansion on the site and marked Richard's grave.

In 1611, historian John Speed published a story claiming Richard's body had been moved by an angry mob and buried under Bow Bridge. Despite there being no clear source for this story, it became widely accepted. In the 1800s, a plaque was even placed next to the bridge. A skeleton found in the river nearby was believed to be Richard's, keeping this mystery alive into the 21st century.

In the early 2000s, the Richard III Society began to search for him, scrutinizing Speed's account. They discovered that his map of Leicester had mistakenly placed Greyfriars Church's location at Blackfriars Church, leading him to an overgrown field instead of the mayor's mansion.

0.2 The Archaeological Quest

Philippa Langley, who led the research in 2005, felt certain she was close to Richard's grave when visiting a parking lot in the Greyfriars area, marked ironically by the letter *R*. Getting permission to dig, her team planned strategically, aligning their trenches east to west as churches were traditionally positioned.

On August 25th, exactly 527 years since Richard was buried, they began to excavate. Astonishingly, six hours into the dig, a skeleton was uncovered exhibiting injuries and a notably curved spine, consistent with Richard's historical portrayal as a hunchback. These

discoveries suggested they had found King Richard III, yet further evidence was required to confirm its authenticity.

0.3 Introduction to the Mystery of Richard III

The enigma surrounding the final resting place of Richard III, King of England, after his death at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485, has persisted for centuries. This mystery endured, shrouded by myths, erroneous claims, and historical misconceptions. However, it was this intrigue that eventually led a small group to an unassuming parking lot in England, culminating in an extraordinary discovery.

0.4 Discovery of the Skeleton

Philippa Langley's team pursued the whereabouts of Richard III with dogged determination. Historical records indicated that after his death, Richard's body was displayed in Leicester and subsequently buried under the Greyfriars Church. The dissolution of monasteries under Henry VIII and misinformation, fueled by historian John Speed's erroneous tale in 1611, further obfuscated the King's burial location, leading to the widespread belief that Richard's body had been moved and reburied elsewhere.

In light of these misdirections, and after scrutinizing further historical evidence, Langley and her team deduced that the true site of Greyfriars Church had been incorrectly identified due to Speed's inaccuracies. They correctly speculated that it was now located beneath a modern parking lot. On August 25th, 527 years after Richard III's burial, an excavation project commenced, funded financially enough to permit only a limited dig.

Amazingly, on the very first day of excavation, within the planned trenches, a skeleton was uncovered, displaying notable traits akin to those attributed to Richard III, including a curved spine and significant cranial damage.

0.5 Verification through DNA Testing

To confirm the identity of the skeleton as King Richard III, the team employed advanced genetic testing techniques. The most definitive method involved comparing mitochondrial DNA from the skeleton to known living descendants. Because mitochondrial DNA is maternally inherited, the researchers meticulously traced Richard III's family lineage through his sister's descendants. This led to Michael Ibsen, a living relative, whose mitochondrial DNA provided a match. Another lineage was traced to provide further corroboration, leading to a woman named Wendy. This dual confirmation through DNA provided conclusive evidence of the skeleton's identity as Richard III, offering a resolution to the centuries-old mystery and enhancing our historical understanding of this period.

0.6 Carbon Dating and DNA Analysis

To confirm the relationship and lineage to Richard III, researchers compared the DNA of two individuals, Michael and another related person, establishing them as direct descendants of Richard III's mother. Before confirming the identity through DNA analysis of Richard's skeleton, it underwent carbon dating tests.

0.6.1 Carbon Dating Method

Carbon-14 is a radioactive isotope absorbed by living organisms. Upon death, carbon-14 begins to decay at a known rate, referred to as its half-life. By measuring the remaining amount of carbon-14 in the skeleton, scientists can estimate the time elapsed since death.

- Initial carbon dating results indicated the skeleton was several decades older than Richard III.
- However, it was discovered that the individual had a rich seafood diet, typical of high-class individuals, which could alter the carbon-14 decay rate.
- Adjusting for this dietary factor, revised results aligned the skeleton's age with the time period of Richard III's death.

0.6.2 DNA Analysis and Confirmation

Simultaneously, DNA testing results confirmed a match between Michael and the skeletal remains, thereby concluding the search for the remains of Richard III.

References

- [1] Lecture LaTeX <https://www.lecturelatex.com>, accessed on January 25, 2025.
- [2] Primal Space Audio content from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zouFjgkE4Y>, accessed on January 25, 2025.